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WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE AND GOVERNANCE

Report by the secretariat

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Introduction

1. The problems facing women in public life and governance were made clear during the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, (1976 to 1985). A major element in the difficulties has always been the interaction between the public and private spheres of life and the position of women in society. Although much has been done to ensure a position for women in public life, not only during the Decade but also since the adoption in 1985 of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies during the period from 1986 to the Year 2000 by the General Assembly of the United Nations, 1/ there remain many serious obstacles to the implementation of women's rights and freedom to participate in public life on an equal basis to that of men.

2. The Forward-looking Strategies addressed these issues in two different ways. First, under the major theme of Equality. Paragraph 43 speaks of the need to eliminate both de jure and de facto discrimination. This need for a double effort is further emphasized in paragraph 45, which states that one of the fundamental obstacles to women's equality and status derives from larger social, economic, political and cultural factors which have been justified on the basis of physiological differences. Second, under chapter 51, paragraphs 356-365, propose a series of more detailed proposals to ensure women's rights to participate in public life. Adopted by the General Assembly, the Strategies were intended to serve as internationally agreed guidelines for implementation at the national level.

3. As a measure of the importance attached to the need for the integration of women in political decision-making, the General Assembly, in its resolution A/48/108, made special mention of women in public life. 2/ Accordingly, this is included in the agendas of all the regional preparatory meetings for the Fourth World Conference on Women. At the same time, the General Assembly noted that information should be provided on the decision-making position of women in the fields of science and technology. Further, the subject of women in international decision-making will be discussed at the Commission on the Status of Women, at its thirty-ninth session, in 1995. 3/

4. The objective of all these activities is to accelerate the removal of the remaining obstacles to women's full and equal participation in all spheres of life, not only in economic and political decision-making but also in action to protect women's human rights at all stages in their life cycle.

5. Involvement in public life can mean occupying formal and visible positions both in political and economic life, filled by selection, election, appointment or promotion. Such positions may be of an executive, representative, advisory, or supervisory nature and often associated with Governments. However, public life must also include participation, on an equal basis with men, in informal and voluntary activities at the community level.

6. The ECE region comprises 54 countries 4/ with vastly different political, social and economic traditions. Women are under-represented in public life and governance across the region with important regional variations. 5/ In this regard women in the region join with women all over the world in facing many common barriers to the exercise of their rights to participate in public decision-making. 6/

I. WOMEN'S RIGHT AND FREEDOM TO PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC LIFE AND GOVERNANCE

7. The Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 7/ and other international human rights instruments, as well as national legislation, ensure de jure equality for women. This legislation has been joined by a number of international conventions specifically drawn up to promote the rights of women to vote and be elected. These rights are made explicit in articles 7 and 8 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. 8/ Significantly, the 1993 Vienna Declaration of Human Rights 9/ urged the full and equal enjoyment by women of all human rights and emphasized that this is a priority concern for Governments and the United Nations.

8. However, from the statistical evidence that exists it is clear the intentions laid out in the Forward-looking Strategies and elsewhere have not generally been realized. The barriers and disincentives to such participation are many, diverse and deeply-entrenched. This affects on both men and women since without the equal participation of women and men in public life there can be no real democratic evolution for society. Mindful of the problem, several intergovernmental, regional and national bodies are making the promotion of women's participation in the democratic process a priority. 10/ One method is to track the statistical imbalances between men and women in public life.

9. Steps are being taken by the United Nations to assess the global situation of women through the use of questionnaires. In addition to the statistical data normally collected within the United Nations system, further work has been proposed on the issue of the placement and promotion of women. It is known that European regional organizations such as the Council of Europe, the Commission of the European Communities and the Nordic Council are carrying out similar exercises and developing strategies to overcome the current imbalances in the employment of women and men. 11/ It is important to gather together this information and maintain an overall picture of the situation within all such organizations across the ECE.

10. The Vienna Declaration 12/ urged "the full and equal enjoyment by women of all human rights and emphasized that this be a priority concern for Governments and the United Nations". This accord with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, 13/ which is accepted as being gender - neutral. The fact that nearly 50 years after the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights it was found necessary to reinforce the central principle on which the Universal Declaration is based indicates the serious obstacles that women still encounter in exercising their human rights.

11. The reason for this situation becomes clearer when examining women's responsibilities. Women are still regarded as the carers in society. Inevitably, women have a reproductive role and responsibilities for the next generation. In addition, women are generally assumed to be responsible for the elderly and infirm. This divides women's rights and responsibilities where international human rights instruments call for the integration of human rights and responsibilities.

II. STRENGTHENING FACTORS THAT PROMOTE THE FULL AND EQUAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE AND GOVERNANCE

12. It has already been noted that women are under-represented in public life and governance throughout the ECE region. This situation is sustained by a range of factors. Some countries have centres of power based on unbroken political traditions. Others have had more dysfunctional experiences. Still others are coping with the tensions involved in moving from authoritarian rule to a system with more liberal social relations in political life.

13. Such different political environments influence the factors that can either promote or negate the equal participation of women in public life and governance. Some of these factors are as follows:

(a) The long-standing past, historical philosophy 14/ and experience of politics as a interaction and competition between men, and the conscious and subconscious perception, retained by both men and women, of man as the rational political or democratic actor, and masculine characteristics as those of leadership;

(b) The absence of a significant body of intellectual opinion supporting the issue of women's representation in public life;

(c) The existence of institutionalized gender-discrimination in public policy (taxation, social security regulations, banking and financial law, the right to citizenship, family law and age discrimination);

(d) The implicit discrimination presented by the culture of an institution political party or association, which has been traditionally male dominated;

(e) The omission of women's perspectives and contributions to society in the media;

(f) The use of sexist language in any form of communication;

(g) Traditional male-oriented assumptions about the nature and role of policy and decision makers (selection system, electoral system and/or size of constituency, timing, duration and location of meetings);

(h) The use of networking as a "patronage" system;

(i) The perception of politics as distant or irrelevant to daily life;

(j) Women's double burden;

(k) Sexual harassment.

All of these factors are likely to place roadblocks in the way of women seeking a role in political life.

A. Education, training and legal literacy

14. Education and early childhood socialization have a major effect on stereotypes current in adult life. Too often they prepare men and women for

separate tasks and life expectations. Many societies, both through informal and formal education, still encourage boys to be more active than girls and to have higher expectations for their future lives, earnings and opportunities. On the other hand, girls are expected to express feminine qualities of submission and good behaviour. The preparation of women for public life must therefore begin in childhood.

15. All Governments agreed to remove gender bias and gender stereotyping from school curricula and teaching materials when they adopted the Forward-looking Strategies and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (Article 5). This expresses the need to modify social and cultural patterns that reinforce notions of superiority and inferiority between the sexes, and is a crucial factor in preparing citizens, male and female, for women's participation in public life.

16. Women's participation in public life has been both limited and enhanced by education. There is a high correlation between education and the pool of applicants from which public appointments are made. The proportion of women in decision-making positions in the 1990s can be substantiated from the ratio of girls to boys in secondary and higher education in the 1970s. This correlation is also supported by data from the United States of America where the increase in college education for women has had a similar effect on their participation in public life. 15/

17. To educate women for political participation and to contribute towards the elimination of existing barriers, the Commission on the Status of Women, at its 1987 session, identified the following strategies:

(a) Educational campaigns by teachers to raise awareness among their female students to participate in non-traditional occupations;

(b) Research and projects combined with scholarships for women to study political issues and processes;

(c) Seminars, community work programmes and artistic activities to encourage women's interest and involvement in political life and leadership capabilities;

(d) The elimination of sexist vocabulary and content from all text books and school manuals. 16/

18. These are all useful measures and the increasing number of books and articles on the subject of women and politics is a testament to many individuals taking up such ideas. School books on civics, and the history of salient women in political history or trades unions also orient women towards the legislative and political processes in their country. School or parental projects on local participatory research such as surveys, then transmitting the findings to local or central government, give young people the sense that as citizens at any level they have the potential to influence policy. Mock debates and simulations of national assemblies are very useful, while school-level research into current events and visits to memorable places can stimulate discussion and an interest in further involvement. University and further education with political clubs are other ways of gaining experience and information on political life.

19. There is a need for training initiatives to enable women to enter decision-making posts at different phases of their life cycle. (This imperative is becoming equally important for men now that traditional approaches to career progression are breaking down.) It can take the form of "mentoring", where experienced female decision-makers give guidance and provide work experience to those who are younger and so transmit a sense of the means by which political decisions are made. While the qualities of leadership may exist in an individual, it is unlikely that they will mature in isolation. Experience, exposure to the issues and participation in the decision-making process are essential.

20. An important source for such recruits are those who have demonstrated leadership in community or voluntary work as well as those in conventional paid employment. This is an area often forgotten by Governments, who contend "they do not know enough qualified women". Creative thinking is required to encourage women who have exerted leadership in the informal sector at the community level to recognize the contribution they have to make to the community at large and foster their skills.

21. An increasing number of organizations including non-governmental organizations offer internships and training to women to seek public office while at the same time maintaining their links with women's groups within the community. This means encouraging women to enter an environment that is frequently hostile to their aims and purposes. A viable support system is often needed. Alliances have to be formed for instance with men, who often make an important contribution. Cross-party coalitions with women are also useful.

22. An important stage in the empowerment of women at both governmental and non-governmental levels lies in support for legal literacy. Before women can truly help themselves, they must understand the de jure provisions for the elimination of discrimination so that their enforcement in day-to-day life becomes a reality. The way forward lies in training which heightens women's awareness of the fact that many barriers to their participation in public life are technically non-existent. An important strategy to ensure equality between women and men must therefore be the allocation of greater resources to legal literacy programmes.

B. Sharing of responsibilities

23. The sharing of private responsibilities to match the sharing of political responsibility could be a new aim in democratic societies, encouraging partnership and mutual participation in both spheres. As time-use surveys demonstrate, in all societies women work many more hours than men, mostly unpaid and in the service of their families. Women are rarely able to control their own time as well as the structuring of employment. This inequality of time worked, and unshared responsibilities, is one of the major inhibitions to women's political participation and a great cause of stress in relationships. The Strategies emphasise that, "the sharing of domestic responsibilities by all members of the family and equal recognition of women's informal and invisible economic contributions in the mainstream of society should be developed as complementary strategies for the elimination of women's secondary status, which has fostered discrimination. 17/

III. WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE

24. Only small numbers of men and women are visibly and continuously politically active. These, even smaller numbers set out and reach the highest roles in leadership. These include extremely few women. Public policy, however, affects the whole of civil society. This means, first, that more women must be involved in the process to ensure that the needs of all parts of the community are reflected. Second, their presence is required to ensure accountability by Governments for the needs of both women and men.

25. In addition, as women are generally responsible for allocating the household budget across the ECE region, account has to be taken of their role as consumers. Women leaders in consumer associations, research and study groups, professional associations and special interest groups such as trade unions are important sources for decision-making roles in public life.

26. Some countries within the ECE region make a practice of alternating professional staff between work in business corporations and government. Although women's role in the corporate sector has greatly increased in recent years, too often they are confronted by the so-called "glass-ceiling". More attention should be paid to the role of women managers in the public sphere.

27. There is ample evidence of women active across the ECE region in all kinds of ad hoc non-governmental activities from parent/teacher associations and school boards to neighbourhood amenity and environmental groups. All these activities have both a grassroots impact and a political impact. The issues and the skills involved do not necessarily transfer such activists directly to the national scene but should be regarded as important centres for local authority activity and pools from which public appointments can be made.

28. Women's right to take part in public life and governance is well established and there is ample evidence that women's contribution to society has been and still is very substantial. Too often this contribution has been made within the informal sector, neither rewarded financially or within the political reward system. The "invisible" nature of this contribution also stands in the way of recognition by men of how much their own careers and existence depend on the work involved.

29. It is therefore important to distinguish among the many different ways in which leadership can be exercised. Such positions are generally publicly elected, selected or appointed positions. There is a need to build bridges between such overt roles and the less well understood leadership roles exercised by non-governmental organizations and grassroots organizations.

30. Political scientists have begun to analyse what makes a "critical mass" to ensure that the political environment is more "woman-friendly". Figures in which there are less than 15% of women are heavily skewed; a balance emerges with 40% of either sex. Such a balance is of the utmost importance in changing popular reactions of both men and women towards women politicians. This has its own effect on the performance and effectiveness of women deputies/members/representatives. It also has an impact on the nature of public debate and policy outcomes right through the decision-making process so that the advancement of women can have a positive outcome both for women and men.

31. Resistance from male politicians to women's advancement may increase as they perceive their own prospects to be threatened in the competition for scarce political positions. As long as this factor is present support from women's groups, civic education of men and women, and special temporary measures such as quotas or targets could be put in place. Specific efforts to eliminate ideas of men against women or women against men should be made. The only way toward true democracy can be to highlight the pressing need for all to work cooperatively towards solving local, national, regional and international problems.

A. Women's involvement and access to science and technology 18/

32. Although women account for over half the world's adult population, the fact that they do not yet contribute to all aspects of national development is particularly apparent in science and technology. Greater efforts are needed to ensure the equal distribution of the benefits of scientific and technological development and its application to both men and women in society. A greater voice for women in the decision-making process related to science and technology including planning and setting priorities for research and development should be facilitated. This is particularly important in the choice acquisition, adaptation, innovation, and application of science and technology for development.

33. Every effort should be made to facilitate the equal access of women and men to scientific and technological training and to the respective professional careers that follow such an education. In similar manner to the military, science and technology has been an exclusive male domain over the centuries and the situation compounded by the exclusion of women from universities where science and technology has been taught virtually until the beginning of this century.

34. The processes needed to "equalize" the creation and utilization of science and technology can be seen to be linked:

(a) Changing role-models to ensure that women's scientific capabilities and achievements are recognized;

(b) More girls and women being encouraged and enabled to enter technical professions and engineering;

(c) Increasing the participation of women in technical, industrial and ethical decision-making;

(d) Scientific and engineering research and development more responsive to women's needs;

(e) Technological innovation more adjusted to meet human needs.

35. Special programmes and incentives can be provided to enable girls and women to study mathematics, the hard sciences and engineering to expand their numbers and influence in high-priority development areas such as clean water, energy, public health, housing, food production and nutrition and a healthy and sustainable environment in which to live. Further programmes could cover the most advanced technologies such as space technology particularly for

environmental monitoring, in order to increase its development for peaceful purposes.

36. The capacity of women to influence research on economic and social development is important, partly to rectify the historic exclusion of women and because it is necessary to anticipate the effects of technology and modern industries on women's roles, time and work. On the one hand, the closer the design and development of science and technology come to the every day culture and the experiences of women the more valuable the technology will be to them; on the other hand, many new ethical issues are arising out of scientific developments in the realms of genetic engineering, bio-technologies and medical techniques, in which women, as citizens and child-bearers, should have a voice - and even a predominant vote. The redefinition of economics and the productive process itself are also important areas in which to eliminate male bias introduced over centuries with its negative effects on women. These have been experienced during the 1980s and 1990s in the areas of structural adjustment and the environment. 19/

B. Women, mass-media and language

37. The information revolution and the radical development of communication technologies have brought many benefits to all societies. The media have an important role in promoting human rights and government accountability to its people. Despite this responsibility, there is little evidence that the media recognize that the public participation of women in civil society is a standard by which Governments and society itself should be measured. The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies called for media reforms and development of media-related communication policies.

38. In some countries serious efforts are under way to identify the barriers to the political participation of women. 20/ Information campaigns have been organized both by the media and national machineries for the advancement of women (a) to eliminate stereotypes in the portrayal of women; (b) to provide information on women's media, publications and research regarding political issues; and (c) to plan training programmes, provide fellowships and internships to familiarize journalists with the work being undertaken to promote women in public life.

39. An assessment of the prevailing institutional conditions in each country is necessary to establish the actions needed to promote awareness and encourage the media as well as the advertising industry to present positive images of women's activities. Appropriate means should be available to counter sexist imagery. Every effort should be made to develop cooperation across the regions media. The availability of support from international organizations and research centres regarding the impact of communications on the promotion of equality should be made known.

40. Current efforts being made to increase the number of women on advisory and executive boards in regulating the media and the communications industry should be supported. This will help enhance the opportunities for women to have an equal voice in determining the content of all public information activities.

41. Language expresses the prevailing values and practices of society, forming our social and cultural identity. It is through this medium that we

internalize our self image as well as our perception of others. It is therefore paramount to avoid the use of sexist language and so combat sexist stereotypes in individual attitudes and language. Many countries and regional organizations have adopted guidelines for the use of gender-sensitive language to eliminate the dominance of masculine terms and make feminine opinion on political life more visible.

IV. WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE

42. Governance covers a range of political activities within many different structures, the ministerial and representational roles in the legislature, staff for secretariat or civil/public service, employment in political party organization, the judiciary, and personnel required for advisory and supervisory boards. Selection is frequently made by systems in which men predominate. Every effort should be made to see that information on recruitment to new positions is widely disseminated so that both women and men have equal opportunities to be considered.

43. Affirmative action is one means of eliminating age-old disparities in the representation of men and women in public life. A number of countries have adopted such measures, which are endorsed by both the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

44. Affirmative action includes the removal of direct and indirect discriminatory practices, procedures, customs, by-laws, and definitions at the point of entry and of promotion, as well as target - or quota-setting in specific rather than general areas. It requires a negotiated and publicized action plan rather than a mere statement of practice, which is periodically reviewed and updated to meet changing circumstances. In countries where these plans have been established over a period of years, there has been a visible increase in the numbers of women at senior levels.

45. The introduction of quotas as a form of affirmative action remains controversial. Some commentators point to the restrictions it imposes and argue that such procedures are undemocratic. Others see it as the most efficient measure yet devised to ensure the participation of women in political life. There is a strong argument that an important aspect of affirmative action lies in the training opportunities it has opened to women. In turn, quotas intended to provide for the minimum representation of women can become the maximum. Unless other measures are taken at the same time, affirmative action could also retard the long-term participation of women with men in political life. Quotas may also give rise to tokenism.

A. Women's participation in political life

46. There is a mutual relationship between the advancement of women and participation of women in politics. Women's political participation is enhanced by the extent of social and economic support structures, whether or not legal discrimination is eliminated, and if stereotyping of women in education and the media is avoided. Increased participation by women in politics can help improve social, economic, legal and cultural conditions for women, and for society as a whole. The advancement of women should therefore be considered a priority in national decision-making, and women should be full partners in those decisions.

47. Awareness of the importance of political participation is rising among women themselves. This has been enhanced by the development of many forms of non-governmental organizations, many of which have come into existence since the beginning of the United Nations Decade for Women in 1975. Coalitions are emerging through connections among grassroots organizations, women in professional associations, researchers, politicians, social workers and professional businesswomen. In countries where such networks exist, where advanced studies and training courses (in political science, law and management) are accessible to and attended by women, and where there are well-developed social support services, women's mass participation in politics is high and their participation in decision-making correspondingly higher than average both in regional and global terms.

1. Women's right to vote and be elected

48. In some countries, women have been celebrating the centenary of their right to vote (the first being New Zealand in 1893) and to stand for election. In the ECE region, Finland was the first such country, followed by Norway. In at least three other countries in the region, the franchise for women came later in the period around the time of the First World War. In others it was after the Second World War. Some six countries in the ECE region legalized women's suffrage only after 1960.

49. Women now have the statutory right to vote and hold office in all ECE countries and a majority of women in most countries have had that right for their entire adult lives. However, few women stand for election and even fewer are elected. It is paradoxical that adult women should make up more than half the electorate but not be represented accordingly although few actual legal barriers exist to women's full participation in decision-making. As has been mentioned above, there are many invisible factors that influence both women's interest and capacity to take an active part in the more public political processes.

50. Most countries do not publish voting preferences by sex and the secret ballot makes the analysis of potential differences in male/female voting patterns difficult. However, use can be made of opinion polls or sample surveys as a means of determining whom, and which party, different sectors of the electorate prefer.

51. There is growing evidence from other sources that women and men have different priorities among issues and are beginning to vote more variedly. Surveys in a number of countries show that women tend to favour different parties to men; that they relate to issues that are of particular concern to women, including family, women's rights, for peace and against military spending. Other studies (for example in some of the countries in transition) show that women are increasingly inclined to see female candidates as capable political representatives.

52. Achieving women's active voting participation requires attention both to the "demand side" of women's voting preferences, and the "supply side" of women as candidates and integral to the effectiveness of political parties and other political institutions.

53. In some countries, women themselves have set up association to support and finance women candidates. Although the resources available rarely meet those of male candidates, this approach has achieved considerable success.

2. Women's participation in political parties

54. Political parties have a strong influence on events even when they are in opposition. In the market economy countries of western Europe women make up between 13% and 50% of party membership but few become party leaders. Those that do generally represent small new political parties. There exists a woman party president in Belgium, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, and two in Denmark and Greece.

55. In many countries "proportional representation" election systems are used through which parties receive a number of seats proportionate to the number of votes cast for them. Each party makes up a list of candidates, which is displayed to the electorate. How many women and in what order or position they are placed on the list by the party is also very important to the ultimate result. This system can favour women provided other affirmative actions are involved.

56. There is a growing tendency for women to organize caucuses, committees or sections to advance the voice of women in political parties. Some have restricted their activities to the mobilization of women's votes at election time. Others have combined this with working to make organizational structures more responsive to women's voices. It is a process that requires further development and support.

57. Other measures to increase women's participation in political parties include setting meetings at times that do not clash with childcare and family needs, introducing facilities such as kindergartens, and setting up day-care centres for elderly relatives as well as establishing women's sections in local constituencies.

3. Women and democracy in transitional economies 21/

58. Since 1989, there have been a series of rapid and unpredictable changes in many countries of the ECE region. These have affected the political process and involved many social and economic changes. Although there are few hard data, it appears that these events have triggered a serious reduction in the participation of women in political life and governance.

59. After the Second World War, many of the countries involved founded the political process on egalitarian ideals. These outlawed discrimination toward women, and emphasized their equality with men in the workplace. Legislation and social provision to provide crèches and kindergartens for the use of working women were enacted. The numbers of women at all levels of education increased, in some cases resulting in higher standards of education among women than among men. Despite these positive trends, the numbers of women at the most senior level in political life were few and disproportionately low in comparison with women's participation in local and regional assemblies. It can therefore be seen that the root causes blocking women's full participation in public life go beyond concepts of political thinking to factors that affect women across the ECE region as a whole.

60. Given the magnitude of the developments noted in para.57 above, it is inevitable that concern for the economy and political stability will take centre stage over any other considerations. In a period of economic restructuring it is all too easy to argue that unemployment can be cut if women "return to the home", irrespective of the fact that there may be no home or possibility of maintaining a household without some sort of remunerated employment or social benefits and child care. Such short-term solutions are also likely to affect long-term economic growth if the economic contribution of educated women to the national work force is dissipated.

61. Coping with economic restructuring in all parts of the world falls heavily on women and the children for whom they most frequently have first responsibility. The additional stress and difficulties arising from economic transformation, combined with a drop in household family resources, also means a parallel drop in the time and physical energy available for activities such as political life, which go beyond basic human survival. Failure to recognize the dangers of excluding women from public life for whatever cause are therefore likely to increase social disruption and hinder moves toward stability and economic growth.

62. Despite the serious difficulties they are experiencing, women in transition to new economic structures have an opportunity to create new forms of participation in non-governmental organizations, to relate with women across all 54 countries and take part in the process of building a new ECE region characterized by gender equity, where not only women are heard but also their ideas become an integral part of political life.

B. Participation of women in legislative activities 22/

1. Women in parliamentary activities

63. The precise structure and functioning of the parliament or national assembly differs from country to country across the ECE region, some being single chambers, some bicameral. Some have federal and state parliaments, as well as local government.

64. In 1993 the worldwide average for women in parliaments was only just over 10%. The ECE region shows especially wide divergences between countries. Between 1985 and 1994 women's participation in parliament decreased from 16.14% to 11.44%. In 1987 the average percentage of women in parliament in several Western industrialized countries was less than 10%, and in east European countries it declined from an average of 26.6% in 1987 to 11.7% in 1990. The Nordic countries led with an average well above 30%. Finland (now 39%) originally led the way but has now been overtaken by Norway with 39.4%. Denmark has 33%, Sweden 33.5% (a slight drop from the previous election). These countries all exceed the 30% mark set by the United Nations for 1995. Most other countries are well below this mark.

65. Generally, legislative assemblies carry out their detailed work through a system of sectoral committees. Inevitably, the low proportion of women returned as members of such assemblies affects the possibility of women's voice being heard in such committees. Where women are represented their participation is less varied. They are most frequently clustered in committees dealing with "soft" issues such as social affairs rather than committees on defense and the economy.

66. Notable breakthroughs exist in many countries, for example in the United Kingdom, where the first ever woman speaker of the House of Commons was elected in 1991, and the President and one of the three Vice-Presidents of the Bundestag in Germany are women. However, it is essential that women have a voice in the drafting of new legislation. Strategies should be developed to ensure that women's voice is represented across all the functions available to members of parliaments and national assemblies.

67. Women's representation in the European Parliament is relatively high compared to that in national parliaments of the European Union member States. This holds for the various parties, as well as for the parliamentary committees. After the 1989 elections, women accounted for 19.3% members of the European Parliament, although this was a fall from 27%. Parliamentary committee chairpersons were 11.1% women, who also represented an average of 23% of the members of parliamentary committees, from a low 7.4% on the Rules of Procedures, Verification of Credentials and Immunities Committee; 8.5% on the Agriculture, Fishing and Rural Development Committee, 9.3% on the Budget Committee, 3.2% on the Development and Cooperation Committee, and 32.2% on the Culture, Youth, Education and Media Committee. The 93.3% of women on the Women's Rights Committee alters the overall average considerably. 23/

2. Women's judicial power

68. Laws and judicial systems are based on a country's traditions and culture. Where men participate generally in the public sector and women in the private, it is not surprising that the law, court procedures and law enforcement agencies should demonstrate gender bias or that so-called "customary practice" influences the impartiality of judges. There is a serious need for training across the judiciary to eliminate such implicit and often unrecognized discrimination by those who practice it.

69. The legal system and the law do not automatically benefit all women equally owing to socio-economic inequalities. These affect a women's knowledge of and access to the law and the ability to exercise their full legal rights without fear of recrimination or intimidation. The lack of information among women concerning their legal rights hampers the recourse to justice.

70. As in other areas of discussion, much depends on the representation of women in the legal professions. In turn, this depends on the availability of higher education and, thereafter, access to the "apprenticeship" called upon for all those who exercise judicial power. Currently, there is a trend for more women to enter law school providing an increasing number of women role models along with men interested in advancing women in the legal profession. Non-governmental organizations are emerging to advocate fairer legal structures and laws that are gender neutral. The United States judiciary provides a useful example of the time lag involved in between greater access for women to education and their increased representation in the judicial process. It was only in 1991 that the first women was elected to the United States Supreme Court and only 5% of Federal judges are women, although a larger percentage can be found at the state level, among state prosecutors and in the legal services available to defendants.

71. The nature of legal systems varies across the region but generally the cost of legal services is high despite schemes to ease the situation. This has a serious effect on the poor who are seeking justice and as the majority of

the poor are women, the law, however just, does not automatically benefit all women. Monitoring groups to study the gender neutrality of court hearings and subsequent decisions have been set up by both the legal authorities and the public working through non-governmental organizations. This activity is being supported in some countries both by Governments and by non-governmental organizations to determine the nature of any possible gender, racial or minority bias existing in the judicial system.

C. Women in executive power

1. Women in the civil service

72. Women in the civil service of most countries are concentrated in a narrow range of lower-level administrative rather than executive grades, and retained in the "softer" areas of health, social services and education. Men are given positions with faster or better career paths with more opportunities for in-service training upon which promotion and higher pay may depend. Women in lower career paths are often over-qualified. Many women work as secretaries or typists, or as cleaners, which also affects the view that women's work in an office should be an extension of the domestic "carer"/helper role.

73. The most frequently mentioned constraints on the participation of women at senior levels of the civil service were identified at the 1990 session it Commission on the Status of Women as: 24/

(a) A lack of adequate recruitment and promotion mechanisms preventing women from entering the civil service in significant numbers;

(b) Insufficient appeal mechanisms and a general absence of women on bodies set up to hear appeals;

(c) Bias in job evaluation and classification;

(d) Unequal opportunities in training and career development resulting in differential promotion rates;

(e) Horizontal gender segregation which leads to the marginalization of women by concentrating them in areas traditionally considered to be appropriate to women;

(f) Insufficient participation of women in selection or promotion panels.

74. Strategies suggested by the Commission to overcome these disadvantages:

(a) Enhancing women´s educational qualifications especially in non-traditional areas;

(b) Providing flexible working arrangements;

(c) A clear indication of civil service personnel practices, for example entitlements, appeal mechanism and promotion;

(d) Implementing affirmative action strategies, for example arrangements for workers with family responsibilities as Internatior l Labour Organization Conventions and Recommendations;

(e) Establishing sections or divisions that deal with women's issues.

2. Women in government: ministers and ministerial functions

75. The absence of women at the highest decision-making levels is striking. Women as heads of state or government account for approximately 5% of the world's leaders and this is a relatively recent phenomenon. A similar situation holds for women ministers where women hold only 4% of those available worldwide. Women ministers remain clustered in ministries relating to social welfare, health, education, culture or women's affairs, with some recently to be found in the environment and development. This reflects patterns of inequality already noted in other spheres of public life.

76. In the vital areas of peace and disarmament, foreign affairs, internal security and defence, a figure of 12 women in 10 countries outside central and eastern Europe has been quoted. In the European Union, 57 out of 515 (11.1%) ministerial positions were held by women, with Netherlands and Denmark heading the league. The lowest figures relate to those countries with the smallest number of women members of Parliament.

82. The absence of women's representation at the higher levels of national decision-making has the further effect of limiting the proportions of women to men in international organizations as well as in the international civil service. Some Governments have taken steps to redress this imbalance by developing registers of qualified women from all spheres of life who might be available to work internationally.

3. Women at the provincial, local and municipal level

83. Women's involvement in public life is most visible at the local level. Many of women's first political activities are temporary, close to home, of immediate relevance to the participants and the community, target-oriented and problem-solving rather than institution-building. They often take the form of street protests, strikes, petitions, marches, informal gatherings and discussions. Politics at the local level is less subject to rigid organizational forms involving formal meetings and public statements. It allows more informal networking, personal contact, and neighbourhood and community activities as well as more flexibility with regard to time requirements and the form of action to be taken. There are generally more women in public life at the local and municipal level than at national level.

84. Some studies point to the discrepancy in the distribution of female representatives between urban and rural areas within the regions. Large towns provide a greater number of politically active women than villages, as in rural areas there is often a shortage of female candidates with broad professional and cultural backgrounds and experience in public activities. Where the situation is atypical and women from rural areas are well represented in public life, this is often the outcome of women working in non-governmental organizations to improve their social and economic status.

85. Women in large enough numbers can change the decision-making styles used in public bodies. In local councils in a number of countries where women have achieved a critical mass, women have created a more collaborative atmosphere, have sought consensus rather than confrontation, and have been less formalistic, more pragmatic, and more open to direct cooperation with people.

V. WOMEN IN ECONOMIC DECISION-MAKING

86. In the last decades the numbers of women have increased in formal employment in the whole ECE region, and they have become an important element in the labour market. However, they have not reached commensurate senior economic decision-making positions, either in the public or private sector. In several economies, considerable restructuring 25/ has resulted in women occupying more tenuous and unprotected jobs or, as for example in the countries in transition, becoming a substantial majority of the newly unemployed.

A. The public sector

87. In many countries of the region, following the Second World War there was a major expansion in public-sector employment. In some countries this was the only employment available. With the advent of restructuring in many parts of the region decision making opportunities are no longer so readily available either for men or women. However, the implicit division into "male" and "female" employment within the public sector has frequently blocked the promotion of women to executive and technical positions. Some countries have made good progress in this area. For example, the United States shows a considerable proportion of women in the higher reaches of the public sector although this trend shows important differences between single and married women and ethnic groups.

88. A major element in such changes has been equal opportunities legislation within countries. Public-sector employers must ensure compliance and, as such, they provide an important incentive to the private sector to follow suit. Positive action measures, such as fixing the proportional participation of women in promotion and hiring committees, are established by several countries. In Canada, various positive actions have been introduced in public sector employment and, through contract compliance, to companies supplying goods and services to the federal Government. In the United Kingdom, since the late 1980s, most departments within the civil service have assigned an equal opportunity officer who is responsible for sex discrimination.

89. Equal opportunity incentives include tax credits, direct wage subsidies, exemption from social security contributions, subsidies to social security benefits, special employment protection. Sweden, for example, provides the most incentives for flexible working time arrangements, parental leave and rights to reduce working hours for parents with young children. The underlying philosophy is to build a working environment that suits the workers, enabling them to reproduce and develop themselves without loss of employment status. This policy also has the effect of increasing productivity. The intention is to provide an environment that accords with the need of both male and female workers enabling them to remain in the public sector as well as meet their joint responsibilities in the private sector. An important element in such incentives is provision for women to maintain or adapt their professional skills during career breaks. Such provision is also required for men faced by restructuring, privatization and the need for early retirement.

90. There are many challenges in public sector employment in the 1990s. Once seen as an area offering many opportunities for women, trends in restructuring the public sector are beginning to limit women's opportunities. The current policies of privatization and liberalization of markets, and emphasis on

competition, have notable effects on women's employment. Some analysts indicate that these have the specific effect of employers using lower-skilled women as a cheap labour force. Very obviously this reduces women's opportunities and aspirations in other areas of life. New private/public mixed enterprises are being discussed in various quarters. Other challenges arise through social and demographic changes, especially in western Europe, with the increasing proportions of older people putting pressure on public-sector health care and pensions; the increasing numbers of women workers intensifies demand for child-care provisions and relief from care of the elderly.

91. Wage inequalities between men and women in like occupations appear in public-sector employment less than in the private sector, because the rates of pay are published, but overall rates of pay tend to be lower in the public sector. Pay gaps between men and women are still to be found in both sectors, particularly through the clustering of women in the lower administrative grades, and failure to use genuinely gender-neutral assessments for promotion.

B. The private sector

92. Much research is required on the situation of women in the private sector. Some indications come from a Profile of Women Leaders 26/ in the Private Sector. This showed such women to be married or living with a partner but without children. They worked weekly between 40 and 50 hours in a company and 5 hours at home and did not take their full legal holiday entitlement of 25 days. These women were able to work like men but women with children are less likely to be in a similar position and thus take up positions as executives in the private sector.

93. It is hard to deny that many women in executive positions have experienced the "glass-ceiling". This phenomenon excludes them from the highest level of decision-making in corporate life. At this stage, fewer performance indicators are applied and those in power tend to solidarity preferring to share the comfort of known patterns of behaviour and to share influence with other men rather than women. Women have qualities of leadership that are less familiar to men and so less reassuring. Gender sensitization at board level is just as important as at other levels of corporate life. Senior women managers also experience a wide pay difference when compared to their male equivalents; which suggests that women are still seen as secondary earners.

94. In many parts of the ECE region, small and medium enterprises characterize the private sector. More and more women are choosing this option and in many cases developing their own business. Where these are successful it offers political and economic integration as well as the exercise of entrepreneurship and a sense of competence. The trend is particularly evident in those countries where there is a high proportion of women in the labour force and many are educated. Many such enterprises owned by women have begun in the home and yield subsistence income. They are likely to have been started without capital investment The United States Department for Labour, for example, notes that the success rate for small businesses is low in many countries.

95. Where essential resources such as the availability of credit and accounting techniques are available, the chances of women maintaining and developing their entrepreneurial activities is greatly enhanced.

96. The European Union started the project NOW (New Opportunities for Women) to support women who start up their own companies and counteract the increasing number of women who are unemployed, and improves women's economic status. The United States Women's Business Ownership Act of 1988 provides women business owners with financial, management, marketing and technical assistance and prohibits unequal credit provision. The Office of Women's Business Ownership in the United States Small Business Administration announced a programme for long-term training and counselling called Women's Network for Entrepreneurial Training.

C. Trade unions

97. Trade unions can influence both political and economic decision-making. As a growing percentage of the labour force, women have increasingly joined trade unions to safeguard their interests but there is a great disparity in women's numbers in trade unions and their access to the decision-making positions. Thus, for example, in the Austrian Confederation of Trade Unions, women represent 31% of the membership, but they hold only 9% in the executive council. The General Federation of Labour in Belgium has 40% female membership and 8% of decision-making positions occupied by women; the Central Organization of Finnish Trade Unions 45% and 19% respectively. The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions, 40% and 20%; the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees 58% and 2%. European Union figures show a wide range, with women in large public sector unions (teaching, health social services) outnumbering men, except on the executive boards; although some smaller unions, in Ireland, for example, have evidently agreed that the ratio of membership must be reflected in the board. A 1985 survey showed that in the 15 major unions of the United States with the highest women membership with an average of 45%, only 9.7% are in national governing boards, (however overall only 12.6% of United States women are unionized). The situation in Canada seems to be better, for women trades unionists hold 25% of executive seats. This is below their membership (30% of women are unionized), but high in contrast to other countries. In Canada, it is politically wise as well as legal, to set aside seats on a governing body in order to ensure the representation of certain interest

98. The tripartite social consultation between Governments, trade unions and the employers needs to pay further attention to facilitating women's entry into trade unions leadership positions, to ensure improvements in the working conditions of other women, and to defend their rights in the face of the enormous changes under way in society.

99. In recent years, trades unions have focused on women's concerns to a greater extent than before, with the appointment of equal opportunity officers and an emphasis on training programmes. An example is the annual 3-day training session ln bargaining leadership, political economy, strategic planning, multicultural diversity skills and public speaking provided by the Women's Institute for Leadership Development (WILD) Massachussetts, United States of America, for women leaders.

VI. WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND DECISION-MAKING IN CIVIL SOCIETY

100. The majority of women - and indeed men - are unlikely ever to be engaged in visible high-level politics and civil administration, or the judiciary. They are members of civil society, seeking to find meaning, balance and order

in their lives, as well as protection against violations of their human rights and dignity whether enacted by the State, commercial interests or other individuals. Members of civil society naturally seek protection from their governments but ultimately they are the arbiters of public policy through the voting system.

101. To ensure consensus between Governments and their constituency, ways of assessing public opinion and cooperation are essential for sound economic and social development. Since the beginning of time, various means of consultation between the "governing" and the "governed" have evolved. In the modern world, non-governmental organizations play a major role in this endeavour. Such organizations are extremely varied in size, internal regulation, funding, staffing and scope. Some function only at the local and national levels, others are active regionally and internationally. They cover every issue of concern to the public and have been called the "conscience of Governments" and at the international level the "conscience of international organizations". By their nature they can raise emerging issues. They can advocate policies that initially might be too controversial to Governments, the legislature or the civil service. As such non-governmental organizations have a crucial role in decision-making within civil society and are an essential means for advancing equality between women and men.

102. Women have always cooperated with others to cope with their traditional role in the family. In the twentieth century this "grassroots" activity has become more precisely organized. The resulting non-governmental organizations present very different profiles. In the area of community action there are those which address traffic dangers, safety within the neighbourhood, support for local schools, welfare services for the elderly and other disadvantaged members of society. Other groups represent particular professional interests, for example, doctors, lawyers, social workers. Still others are clustered around special issues : women's human rights, the elimination of traditional practices harmful to women and children, child labour and AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) sufferers.

103. Such NGOs are linked to the decision-making process in myriad ways but all these relationships have the quality of "consultative status". Sometimes, this is an informal, sounding board type of activity. In others, it is legally ratified and the subject of declared resolutions. There is no formal career path into higher level decision-making available but the exercise of consultative status has a potent effect on change. In effect, leadership roles in NGOs appear to be a public extension of women's traditional leadership roles and responsibility within the family. It is an area of political participation that is often misunderstood and requires much further research and inquiry.

104. More women's organizations could increase their participation in civil and political life and work publicly as advocates and lobbyists for the advancement of all women in local and wider contexts. They can also make educational material and programmes, interpret and define policies, and generate information about opportunities available to women. They can be the link between institutionalized politics and the politically "inactive" women.

105. Where NGOs join together to advance mutually agreed aims and purposes, their role in political decision-making is likely to be greatly enhanced. They have a powerful role in observing and checking the exercise of conventional

politics. Working together, NGOs can make sure that legislation relevant to women's political participation is not only de jure but also de facto.

106. Solidarity is the key ingredient to successful NGO activity. Solidarity is more than expressions of good will through formal events, although these are important because they make a statement to the wider world, as well as, to those supported. Solidarity can be exercised through the formation of coalitions and caucuses, which respect the identity of others, while finding common ground on which to work together. It is the extension and sharing of skills, both through formal programmes and informal contact, and the raising of resources for others. Solidarity can also be expressed through the many small acts of friendship and mutual assistance, acknowledging the sources of ideas and writings, sharing or giving space to others, naming problems, as well as networking and spreading information, and even taking up leadership in the same or a parallel cause without directly knowing the protagonists, counting the cost or anticipating reward.

107. Solidarity is listening to others, rather than imposing views upon them. It is trying to make a difference and to transform policy as well as the knowledge on which it is based. It is to take responsibility and work to limit the damage that may be created through external policies, for example on international debt or structural adjustment policies; or to promote recognition of women's rights by the private sector's international operations. Women and women's movements are making an impact on the mainstream, for example on redefining economics, security, the links between producer and consumer, and these are being taken up by supporters and like-minded people in the international community. Advocacy and lobbying around issues that are not for personal promotion, are acts of solidarity. Solidarity is also taking up and expanding the rights and opportunities won by the sacrifice of others and not taking them for granted because, as historical events show, it is very easy for ground to be lost.

VII. WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN MILITARY AND PEACE-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

108. The Second World War involved both women and men in the military and since then women have increased their participation in the armed forces in most countries of the region. It is rare for women to have a direct role in combat but as citizens they are more at risk from military activities than as members of the armed forces whether acting as regular or irregular forces. This is made clear by the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Index, which cites 84 current conflicts. Women and their dependents form the majority of refugees and displaced people, victims of military aggression. They are also the victims of specific forms of violence that arise during periods of such conflicts: organized and casual rape, systematic, forced and incidental prostitution, the horror of genocide.

109. With the end of direct military conflict and the historic opportunity to resolve the dilemmas which started essentially man-made conflict, women have rarely been invited to the conference table or involved in long-term peace building activities. Where new constitutional arrangements and state institutions are required, women are most frequently absent from the discussions. The Forward-looking Strategies make specific commitments on conflict resolution, international cooperation, multilateral and bilateral negotiations and disarmament efforts.

110. Given the situation noted above it is clear that a major effort is required to implement these paragraphs and enable women to share in peace building. As recommended elsewhere, a priority should be establish a pool of qualified women experts with wide-ranging experience to complement those technically qualified such as disarmament experts.

111. Peace education is an imperative for all members of society. As parents, care providers and often as the majority of primary school teachers, women have a profound influence in encouraging consideration for others, sharing, partnership, toleration, the peaceful solution of conflicts in terms of justice and equality. Peace education is closely linked to non-sexist education aimed at creating equal opportunities in the development of boys and girls. In both cases, the objective is the creation of a just and equitable society for all

112. Women participate in the military through the exercise of their vote. Governments maintain military forces as a function of their existence and to cope with external attack. However, military expenditure requires constant public scrutiny. But women too often see this as "men's business". Greater efforts should be made not only to develop legal literacy among women but political literacy to emphasis the fact that using the vote wisely has significant long-term effects with regard to the percentage of the national budget spent on defence.

113. No systematic country-by-country data have been found to exist on women in military forces in terms of numbers, service or rank. In general, it has been the more traditional areas that have been open to women, such as medical, clerical and other administrative support services. Since the passage of equal opportunities legislation in some countries, women are now more frequently to be found in combat divisions. Some of the experiences of women in the military are beginning to be documented. Less is known about the participation of women in irregular combat forces, although these may have been more open to women.

VIII. FINAL OBSERVATIONS

114. The complex of issues concerning women in public life and governance demonstrate that open commitment is necessary to create an environment in which women can exercise their rights and responsibilities on an equal basis and in partnership with men. Governments, as have been seen, bear the responsibility for creating just such a context. Governments should make their commitment public, open up public debate on the issues involved in the participation of women in public life and, draw upon the best methods already practised in the ECE region and in which the region is particularly rich. Governments should enable women, and women's organizations in particular, the space to discuss the merits and disadvantages of such methods and their adaptation to the different political situations in which women and men live. Every area of public life, political parties, parliament/national assembly, executive, and judiciary, as well as the scientific community, trades unions and media, public and private-sector employers require specific policies and affirmative measures rather than general recommendations. The implementation of full human rights for all should bring about balanced and equal relationships between different social and political partners, as well as between women and men. Although there should be no cost placed on the attainment of peace and social justice, the economic benefits of removing

biases, discrimination and violence can be enumerated and become convincing arguments for those in power to take the necessary action.

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